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On Political Participation:

Discursive Pragmatics and Social Interaction in *Nolitics*

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Abstract: *Nolitics* is a Nigerian online political discussion forum that provides an opportunity for social interaction and political participation, through new media technologies. It is hosted by *NaijaPals* – a hosting website with social networking and blogging activities. *Naijapals* maintains an online community of bloggers with *Nolitics* as a discussion forum solely devoted to social and political debates. Members exchange information and engage in social analyses and criticisms of Nigeria's political performances. A total of 104 'posts' are analyzed in the framework of computer-mediated discourse analysis with insights and methods from pragmatics. Findings show that discursive/ pragmatic strategies such as modality, implicitness/implication, directive speech acts, proposition/inference and indirect speech acts function as a means of mobilizing people towards political participation e.g. voting during elections. They are also used as strategies for attacking corruption and political power abuse, initiating and practising political propaganda by politicians and as discourse tact of preventing offences. The study reveals that new media technologies not only promote political participation and governance but show that the people are hungry to be involved in political issues and questions that affect their lives. Corruption and political power abuse are identified as major banes of modern democracies, particularly the Nigerian context.

Key words: *Nolitics*; Nigeria; Politics; Political Participation; Discussion forum; Posts

INTRODUCTION

Nolitics is a politically-oriented discussion forum in the *NaijaPals* online community website. The term 'Nolitics' is portmanteau word (or coinage) from 'Naija Politics'. 'Naija' (also written as *9ja*) is a clipped version of 'Nigeria.' The forum generally maintains and promotes social discourse - where members post and receive comments on current social and political topics in Nigeria. Interactions are usually among young people who presumably have equal rights to share information and express their opinions. The forum is frequently updated to keep up with current events in society, especially political developments. Since *Nolitics* take the form of blogs, they share some general features that are common to the blog genre such as (1) asynchronicity (i.e. unlike synchronous computer-mediated discourse (CMD), they do not require that users be logged on at the same time in order to send and receive messages, rather messages are stored at the addressee's site until they are read (Herring, 2004), (2) one-way communication (3) message are archived until they are read, (4) web-based delivery and a tendency for messages to be text only (5) the display of blog entries in reverse chronological sequence, with a 'comment' option below each entry (Herring, 2007).

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Other features of blogs are (a) regular, dated-stamped entries (timeliness), (b) links to related blogs (blogrolling), (c) RSS or XML feed (ease of syndication), (d) passion (voice) (Gill, 2004). Blogging is often viewed as a new form of grassroots citizen journalism and a way to shape democracy outside the mass media and conventional party politics (Gillmor, 2003 cited in Ifukor, 2007). *Nolitics* reflects the tendency of an online forum to form opinions that may have significant implications on development policies that may have far reaching consequences on the life and future of a people (Ifukor, 2008). Going by Herring's and her colleagues's classification of blogs into three major types, i.e. *filters*, *personal journals* and *k-logs* (i.e. knowledge blogs), we can conclude that *Nolitics* combines features of 'filter' and 'k-logs.' *Filter blogs* are those that contain observations and evaluations of external, predominantly public events; *personal journals* (usually the most common) are used to report events in the blogger's life as well as the blogger's cognitive states; while *k-logs* focus on information and observations around an external topic, project or product (Herring et al 2007). In social interaction on *Nolitics*, members not only post comments, they also engage in some forms of social analyses and criticisms of Nigeria's socio-political system, thus participants lend their voices to topical issues that shape the society. Ifukor (2010) demonstrates that the dialectical relationship between discourse and social practice (Fairlough, 1989) and the process of political empowerment can be textually illustrated through the choice of vocabulary and sentiments expressed in blogs or discussion forums. Posts/journals on *Nolitics* are similar to blogs, which are frequently-updated and arranged in reverse chronological order (Herring, 2004). Social interactions are facilitated through user profiles containing biographical and contact information (Kouper, 2010). Users sign in to the hosting site with their private usernames and passwords.

As weblog (or simply blog) and discussion forums have become one of the most popular social media technologies among Nigerian users, scholarly responses to its discourse contents and features is just emerging. A close analysis of how meaning is made in some specific discussion forums in relation to the social context is likely to reveal opinions and different ways of thinking about governance and political participation. Modern democratic principles demand that the people are involved in political governance, especially on issues that affect their lives directly or indirectly. This study shows that blogs or discussion forums have been used or is being used as a medium for political involvement and participation. As one of the first follow-up studies on the use of social media technologies in Nigeria, particularly weblog and twitter (Ifukor, 2010), this study analyzes political discourse and social interaction by members of *Nolitics*. One of the first studies in this direction centers on the use of political blogs as social mobilization in the 2007 general elections in Nigeria (Ifukor, 2008). The study concludes that 'weblogs are influential political tool for mobilization and Nigerian bloggers have made use of them to educate, enlighten, and encourage eligible voters to perform their civic duties (Ifukor 2008). Thus, citizen's access to electronic social media empowers them to active involvement in democratic governance (Ifukor, 2010). The present study examines interactional norms of participants, including pragmatic strategies that are used in the CMD of the discussion forum and how this CMD functions as social criticism, social and political mobilization (especially towards the 2011 general elections in Nigeria), political propaganda and other related issues that border on development and social stability in Nigeria.; brief demographic information about the interactants is also highlighted.

1. BLOGS AND DISCUSSION FORUMS AS SOCIAL MEDIA FOR SOCIO-POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

In addition to the works cited above, the growing literature on CMD, especially on the blog genre has attempted to characterize and examine the forms and functions of blogs/discussion forums. For instance (Herring, 2004; Herring et al, 2005) identifying weblogs as a distinct genre of CMC, emphasize its interpersonal nature; they argue that the assumed interactive nature of blogs and their orientation towards external events are a bit more exaggerated and tend to underestimate the importance of blogs as individualistic, intimate forms of self-expression. The present study however shows that the use of blogs or discussion forums far exceeds mere individual self expressions to include wider issues of social and political importance. Stefanone & Jang (2007) describe blogs as 'a relationship maintenance tool.' They argue that bloggers who exhibit both 'extraversion and self-disclosure' traits tend to maintain larger strong-tie social networks and more likely to appropriate blogs to support those relationships, age, gender

and education notwithstanding. While proposing a general model for analyzing and comparing different uses of blogs, Schmidt (2007) argues that 'individual usage episodes are framed by three structural dimensions of rules, relations, and code, which in turn are constantly (re)produced in social action. As a result, 'communities of blogging practices' emerge—that is, groups of people who share certain routines and expectations about the use of blogs as a tool for information, identity, and relationship management' (Schmidt, 2007:1). Hence, different scholars agree that blogs are a social activity (Nardi et al, 2004a) or social work (Ifukor, 2010), often used for grassroots journalism (Gillmor, 2003; Gill, 2004) and for political mobilization (Cross, 2005; Drezner & Farrell, 2004). In some cases blogs have been applied to do partisan politics (Adamic & Glance, 2005). For instance, the John Kerry and George Bush political campaign teams adopted the use of blog. Incidentally, Bush's blog had more posts to prospective young adult voters than Kerry's (Trammell, 2007). In 2008, Barack Obama and his campaign team also used blog and Twitter to disseminate crucial information about Obama's bid for the presidency (Ifukor, 2010). The Iranian blogosphere liberalised political discourse in the face of a hostile media environment (Kelly and Etling, 2008) and Twitter was used by ordinary citizens to provide insider up-to-date information about the Iranian 2009 post-election protests (Ifukor, 2010). Because of its growing popularity for mediating political discourse, the credibility of blogs have been questioned and research shows that blogs were judged as moderately credible, but as more credible than any mainstream media or online source (Johnson, Kaye, Richard, Wong, 2007).

2. METHODOLOGY

In her 'faceted' classification scheme of computer-mediated communication (CMC), Herring (2007) identifies two basic factors that shape CMD namely (1) medium factors (an attempt to discover under what circumstances specific systems affect communication and in what ways). In which case, factors such as synchronicity, message transmission, persistence of transcript, size of message etc. becomes very important. (2) Situation factors (information about participants, their relationships to one another, their purposes for communicating, what they are communicating about and the kind of language they use) are also examined. The latter factors may be sub-divided into categories such as participation structure, participant characteristics, interactional norms (attitudes, beliefs, ideologies and motivation), goal of interaction etc. This approach facilitates data selection and analysis in CMD research on the basis of empirical evidence from the CMD research literature. The present study, adopting Herring's method of Computer-mediated discourse analysis (CMDA) examines some questions that reflect Herring's 'situation factors' such as information about participants (e.g. writers of posts) and their relationship to one another; topics of interaction, interactional norms and goals of interaction. However, in order to enrich the quality of CMDA in the context of this study, discursive strategies and speech acts within the structures of the posts in the corpus are identified and analysed with insights obtained from pragmatics.

3. THE CORPUS

The corpus comprises 104 posts posted within a period of four months, i.e. between March and July, 2010 – a period that witnessed significant events in the history of Nigerian politics and society. The 'events' include the (i) Jos religious crisis (ii) political crisis subsequent to a power vacuum in the Executive arm of the Nigerian government created by the absence of the President on health grounds (iii) the death of Nigeria's President Umaru Yar'Adua, and subsequent inauguration of Goodluck Jonathan, (a Niger Delta indigene) as President (iv) constant crises in the Nigerian legislature and demands for the resignation of the Speaker of the House of Representation (v) beginning of political campaigns towards the 2011 general elections and the appointment of a new INEC president, ('INEC'- Independent National Electoral Commission). These events form the main topics of interactions and debates in the corpus. The corpus is made up of the first 104 posts downloaded from pages 1-3 of the discussion forum pages. The posts that are analysed are those that mediate the Nigerian internal affairs, namely politics and socio-ethnic issues that reflect the main thematic focus of *Nolitics* itself. Table 1 gives brief demographic information about the post writers.

Table 1: No of Posts by male and female bloggers

Writers	No. of Posts	Percentage
Male	96	92.3
Female	08	7.7
Total	104	100

The above table immediately suggests that female members of the discussion forum are not active participants on political matters and debates, or are not as interested as do the men. Although the posts in the corpus represent instances where a blogger posts more than one journal with different themes at different times, however they still represent the male voices. This research reveals that female bloggers that posted 'comments' in response to posts by the men, much more outnumbered those that initiated the discussions and debates. Of course, this is not attributable to the issue of gender asymmetry, an issue which scholars view is inherent in male dominant discourses. Herring (2001) for instance observes that in some discussion forums contentions of many male messages tend to discourage women from responding while the concerns of women are viewed as 'waste of bandwidth.' Rather Nigerian women in *Nolitics* appear to take the 'sidon look' approach to the Nigerian political debate. The researcher also observed that there were more reactions coming from female bloggers on social and ethnic matters than they were on politics. Another research may want to investigate the participation and performance of Nigerian women on general personal blogs or discussion forums that dwell on other subjects, such as 'life style,' 'religion' 'fashion' etc.

4. DISCURSIVE PRAGMATICS AND SOCIAL INTERACTION

It must be stressed at that most of the members of the discussion forum (*Nolitics*) are fairly educated Nigerians, particular those familiar with CMD and are regular users of CMC. The various levels of discourse in *Nolitics* also highlight various degrees of English language proficiency. Hence, some variations that are evident in the posts reflect linguistic choices of the writers. The language proficiency which is close to the native speaker's (i.e. the Standard Nigerian English, (SNE)) is more prevalent in 'quotes' from the popular press or other online sources than in personal diaries and comments. Since *Nolitics* demonstrates intra-group CMD, the use of discursive markers that reflect ethnic and national identity, including some culture-specific words, names and verbal genres that are particularly Nigerian are evident in the CMD (see Chiluba, 2010b). Although the age of participants in CMD contexts is often revealed through their preoccupations and life experiences communicated in message content (Herring, 1998c), they are not apparent in *Nolitics* since topics are entirely reflexive of the external/off-line context. But we can conclude as hinted in the introduction that interactants are Nigerian youths, revealed through their particular interactional norms, (e.g. use of emotions; spelling manipulations characteristic of CMC etc) and interest in political revolution in Nigeria which are typical of the new generation.

Ifukor, (2010b forthcoming), observes that some 'informal Nigerian electronic communication' data display 'hybridity with humour' meaning that they demonstrate text-based linguistic creativity including spontaneity and playfulness. In the current study spontaneity is reflected in the use of the local pidgin, which draws speakers from virtually all ethnic groups. Today, the Nigerian pidgin is accessible to more speakers in social communication than the SNE and is native language to a good number of people in the Niger Delta (Igboanusi, 2008). In the posts, the use of pidgin featured frequently in the personal posts and comments. Some posts combine code-switching between pidgin and the native language. Post 29 is an example of a serious political topic written in pidgin: *My fellow Nigerians our mumu don do (our stupidity is enough) let's protect and police our vote, so abeg (I beg) make una join us for (lets all join in) the on going campaign against further elections for (in) Nigeria. My people make we (let us) stand by one man, one vote: one woman, one vote: one boi, (boy) one vote, one girl, one vote...etc.* The Nigerian pidgin has the advantage of flexibility and spontaneity and provides the medium for conveying cultural and language aesthetics. The primary pre-occupation and communication purpose of *Nolitics* make it mandatory for discussion group members to adopt the group norms, particularly making critical assessments of Nigeria's socio-political situation. Because the bloggers' social experiences are involve in the CMD, they often transfer terms and practices from off-line cultures to CMD and this contributes to shaping their linguistic behaviour (Herring, 2001). Hence, discourse topic (or activity type) condition linguistic and pragmatic

strategies that come into play. Socio-political and ethnic related topics are considered 'serious,' therefore unlike personal dairies and other discussion forums that centre on jokes, love and relationships, business etc, *Nolitics* which is more of flaming, deploy some high persuasive speech acts. Main discursive/pragmatic strategies evident in the discussion forum are (i) modality (ii) implicitness/tact of discrediting (iii) propositions and inferences (iv) implications (v) directive acts and (vi) indirect speech acts.

(i) Modality 'will' and 'Must' as discourse strategy

Going by the systemic functional model, modality represents some types of judgments that can be made reflecting probability (of an event), obligation or inclination of someone to perform an action (Halliday, 1994). These judgments may be expressed by modal verbs *may* (probability) *might* (remote probability), *will* or *must* (obligation) (Melrose, 1991). According to Verschueren (1999), modality involves the many ways in which attitudes can be expressed towards the pure reference and predication content of an utterance, signaling factuality, degree of certainty or doubt, vagueness, possibility, necessity and even pessimism and obligation (quoted in Fairclough, 2003:165). It also represents stance or degree of affinity speakers or writers take towards representation (Hodge and Kress, 1988; Fairclough, 2003). In some of the posts under focus, there is a sense of inclination and obligation created in the attempts to mobilize people towards their civic responsibilities such as voting during general elections. Obligatory modal verb 'must,' is used particularly by those that campaign for votes for certain candidates (e.g. Goodluck Jonathan). The posts listed below are examples of posts that campaign for the President (i.e. Jonathan) and **P13** and **P28** are of particular interest in the analysis. Notably these posts are (posted) by Jonathan's campaign team. For the limited space of this paper, only the topics of the posts are reproduced here, however, the contents are analyzed and discussed. ('Post' is abbreviated as 'P.')

- P.13. Jonathan must run (by baruch, posted: June 24, 2010, 02:38:57 PM)
- P.14. what do you want Jonathan to do? (by goodluck4ggov, posted: June 16, 2010, 05:20:02 PM)
- P.21. 2011: Northern leaders give Jonathan go ahead (by Nametalkam, posted: July 16, 2010, 12:01:57 AM)
- P.28. Will u vote President Goodluck? (by etiese, posted: May 29, 2010, 12:10:33 AM)
- P.63. Jonathan again!!! (by goodluck4ggov, posted: June 17, 2010, 03:50:14 pm)
- P.80. More groups ask Jonathan to run in 2011 (by newslive, posted: May 21, 2010, 01:41:29 AM »
- P.84. One Year Not Enough to Meet Targets, Says Jonathan

On the one hand, the post writer's use of the obligatory 'must' in **P13** makes it mandatory for Jonathan to run for the presidency; on the other hand, **P28** puts the same idea in form of a question when in actual fact, it is meant to be read as an obligation or certainty i.e. 'u *will* vote President Jonathan.' 'Will' like 'must' is foregrounded in the topics of the posts revealing the writers' own position; the people's assumed support for the incumbent president is also taken for granted as a matter of certainty. The writers who perhaps are ardent supporters of Goodluck Jonathan take an idealized position where they appear to speak for everyone and with an idealized sense of 'affinity' with the electorate, make voting for Jonathan an imperative and obligatory duty for all Nigerians. Here, the pragmatic deployment of modality 'must' and 'will' represents the viewpoint of the average southerner who mobilizes others towards ending the strong influence of the northern political elites in the Nigerian government. The posts therefore highlight the typical attitude of a southerner especially from the minority ethnic group who are challenging the perennial power of the northern oligarchy in Nigeria. The debate for the 'zoning' of political power to the south has been going on for years. Hence, the discourse process which constructs obligation to resistance to domination is deployed to mobilize the people who appear to be undecided. This is the kind of discourse strategy we often find in political communication where an individual pretends to speak for everyone and majority support is assumed. A similar pragmatic tact is evident in **P80**. 'More groups ask Jonathan to run.' There is a degree of certainty and factuality although without the use of modal verbs in the topic of the post. The 'more' which sounded like hundreds, were only three (3) erstwhile unknown groups. But this hyperbolic reference is taken in other to sound convincing and factual. The third group known as 'Jonathan Youth Vanguard' is a new political group founded by the president's campaign team. Jonathan himself makes this clearer in **P84** where he gives reasons for his intentions to run for president in 2011, i.e. the

assumption that his one year in office is generally not enough for Nigerians to expect any tangible development. Again the kind of political excuse to remain in power indefinitely.

(ii) Implicitness and tact of discrediting

In the media, journalists' lexical or linguistic choices are often guided by what they intend to foreground, what to make explicit or left implicit in the text. These have consequences on the degree of implications expressed in the text either as entailments or presuppositions (van Dijk, 1991). Thus, words or clauses may imply ideas or propositions which may be inferred on the basis of background knowledge. Sometimes what is implied could be more revealing than what is actually expressed (van Dijk, 1991). Obvious attacks and discrediting political opponents are often evident in political discourse through implicitness. There have been some opposing views about democracies being a fatally system of government because of its tendency to subvert the will of the people, through buying up or controlling the press, and by placing compromised politicians who can purchase political leadership with money (Bjerknes, 2009). All of these are often mediated in political discourse. Attacks and discrediting opposing views are reflected in the posts below, which are examples from the corpus.

- P.12. IBB campaign organisation collapsed (by newslive, posted: July 19, 2010, 02:49:02 PM)
- P.57. stop IBB (by Baruch, posted: June 24, 2010, 02:48:59 PM)
- P.60. Ex-Nigerian military ruler Babangida vows to be next president (by Ayemokhia, posted: April 19, 2010, 05:43 AM)
- P.88. 2011: IBB romances top musicians (by Nametalkam, posted: May 26, 2010, 08:05:17 PM)
- P.92. IBB President! Nigerians are we cursed? (by manuo, posted: May 23, 2010, 10:01:09 AM)

In the above posts particularly **P12**, **P60** and **P92**, there are obvious implications about both the moral and logistic strengths of Babangida's political campaigns. **P12** tactically reveals the weakness of his political campaign, which should be of interest to his main opponent, Goodluck Jonathan. In fact the reason given for the collapsed of IBB's campaign organisation was that the 'campaign coordinators' suddenly realized that Jonathan was the Messiah that would free the country 'from bad rulers to good governance where everyone will feel a sense of inclusiveness, be happy and proud.' The reason for this sudden realisation was left implicit in the text, arguable a tact of discrediting IBB, which is also a subtle attack on his election campaigns. Also, notice the use of 'vows' in **P60** (the writer didn't say 'hopes' or 'believes'). With the general knowledge of his political records as a military dictator and the various accusations of corruption against him, 'vows' here, presupposes that he could be the next president either by democratic means or other means such as money or fraud. In fact in this context, the writer implies the latter. Blog writers and various discussion groups claimed that the former military ruler lacked the pedigree and reputation for leadership in Nigeria. This explains why the writer of post **P57**, describes him as 'the man who murdered democracy,' a highly negative evaluative judgement. It is with this background knowledge that the writer of **P92** asks: 'IBB President! Nigerians are we cursed?' Apart from discrediting the political aspirant, this post is also a serious negative interpretation of the role of IBB as a former leader. However rather than express it explicitly that 'Babangida is a curse to Nigeria' (which would have been perhaps a libel, the writer turns it into an (interrogative) implicitness, where 'Nigerians' is foregrounded in the topic of the post and the real meaning of the expression (i.e. Babangida as the next civilian president is likely to plunge Nigeria into further socio-economic misfortune) is left implicit.

(iii) Propositions and Inferences

As pointed out above, writers/speakers often encode certain meanings (sometimes controversial meanings) and leave the reader/hearer to work out possible interpretations. Thus, meanings are revealed in texts through inferences – a deductive process of working out meaning from the text or utterance based on some background knowledge of the context/shared understanding of values and beliefs between the writer (or speaker) and reader (or hearer). According to Horn & Ward (2006), speakers (or writers) do implicate (or make propositions) while hearers (or readers) do infer. While some of the posts especially those in the critique category, perform the various 'representative acts' (Searle, 1986) such as reporting and claiming, also asserting, exposing and condemning, inferences and conclusions could be drawn from them, which could result in a more comprehensive interpretation of the texts. Certain propositions leave the reader to

draw his/her own conclusion; generally 'comments' made on posts/blogs are based on individual inferences. Most of the posts in this category apart from those expressed as interrogatives make claims and propositions which are not conclusive in themselves but are left for the reader to make inferences and post comments. Many of the 'opinions' and 'views' are often mere inferences from propositions implicated by writers. For example the comments that follow **P55** and **P110** below reflect the writers' inferences:

P55. Ribadu Has Accepted Jonathan's Offer (by Ayemokhia, posted: April 05, 2010, 12:48:21 PM)

P110. Breaking News - FG drops all charges against Ribadu (by Ayemokhia, posted: April 02, 2010, 12:25:26 PM)

5. COMMENTS

- At least we're making progress...
- No matter how long it takes, truth shall prevail over falsehood. Welcome back, Mr. Cleaner
- It is necessary so that Nigerian can have a way forward...
- Justice will prevail no matter how long etc.

Thus, posts are often cleverly framed with presuppositions intended to elicit this kind of positive inferences and conclusions often targeted at improving or enhancing the reputation and public assumption of a particular politician. Very often this kind of discourse is influenced by some political groups who sponsor the press or blog writers to manipulate public opinion to their favour. Nuhu Ribadu referred to as 'Mr. Cleaner' by the second comment (alluding to his methods against corruption in Nigeria) enjoys positive representations in the posts. Ribadu was the anti-graft crusader and former head of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) under former President Obasanjo. He was suddenly demoted and later removed from office under controversial circumstances, following his roles against corruption. However some comments remained skeptical about his intended return to government. Already Jonathan's government has been accused of representing Obasanjo's interests. In fact some critics believe that Jonathan's administration is a mere extension of Obasanjo's. Hence, a new EFCC might turn out to be another Mr. Obasanjo's tool to fight his political enemies even with Ribadu at the helm; after all, Ribadu had been Obasanjo's man. This could partly be responsible for the opposition from ex-governors to Ribadu's proposed return, (**P85**). While some governors might be jittery over their ill-acquired wealth, others are still suspicious of Obasanjo's political motives.

Other posts that are framed to elicit (negative/positive) inferences are those that perform representative speech acts such as reporting, claiming and affirming. These are political discourse strategies to promote either a negative or positive public opinion of a particular candidate. In this context, certain lexical items (often nouns and verbs), phrases and grammatical structures are carefully chosen to foreground or background actions or attitudes attributed to certain politicians or political groups. These help form general notions and value judgement about such individuals or groups. This type of posts functions either as critique or propaganda as illustrated in the following posts:

P9. Reps tell Bankole to resign (by aliaaz, posted June 10, 2010, 08:31:32 AM)

P35. The biggest fight of Nigerian Legislators (by Nametalkam, posted: July 08, 2010, 04:00:09 PM)

P59. Nigeria and useless spending (by Evalastin, posted: June 22, 2010, 11:11:55 PM)

P.72. NLC: Saraki has fulfilled promise to workers (by daudaalabi, posted: June 05, 2010, 02:30:40 PM)

P. 89. Dr. Bukola Saraki - Arguably the Best Governor in Nigeria (by Akeredolu, posted: May 26, 2010, 09:39:23 AM)

In **P9** 'reps' is foregrounded (as the agent of the clause) in the topic of the post, implying 'majority.' In the context of democracy, majority 'carries the vote.' However, in the report, Bankole (the Speaker of Nigeria's House of Representatives) was challenged by a certain group of legislators who accused him of 'high-handedness,' arrogance and corruption; the accusation however did not come from the majority of the 'Reps' as the topic presupposes. This kind of foregrounding, however can lead to negative inferences and

form negative judgement about the Speaker, which of course is the intention of the discourse in the first place. By implication Bankole is 'bad' while his political opponents are 'good' (van Dijk, 2005). This is already reflected in the comments that followed. Also notice the use of 'biggest fight' and 'useless spending' in **P35** and **P59** which are deployed to elicit negative conclusions and value judgements about Nigerian political governance. Similarly, 'fulfilled promises' and 'best governor' in **P72** and **P89** respectively are likely to draw positive inferences in favour of Bukola Saraki. The subjective evaluation of Saraki as 'best governor' is mere presupposition and political propaganda. Post **72** which is an assumed assessment by the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), was not made explicit in the full report. This is a type of propaganda by Saraki's Campaign team to pave the way for the governor's political ambitions towards the 2011 general elections in Nigeria. **P89** is also a form of propaganda, which in the post is supported by some claims of the governors 'achievements.'

(iv) Implications

Implications, as already pointed out above are inherent in political discourse, where hearers/readers of some political statements are bound to deduce certain conclusions. Certain political claims are made and subjected to open-ended interpretations, especially where a speaker/writer deliberately attacks an opponent by encoding some obvious implications, without sounding too direct. The post below implicates certain meanings that could form temporal or permanent impressions about the individuals concerned and their actions.

- P.25. Jonathan set to probe Babangida over 12.4 billion Scam (by newslive, posted: June 23, 2010, 03:29:47 PM)
- P.45. Ibori associates sentenced to 5 years in Prison (by Nametalkam, posted: June 07, 2010, 08:22:29 PM)
- P.85. Ex-governors Mobilise Against Ribadu's Return (by Ayemokhia, posted: April 07, 2010, 08:03:52 PM)
- P.21. 2011: Northern leaders give Jonathan go ahead (by Nametalkam, posted: July 16, 2010, 12:01:57 AM)

P25 and **P45** leave certain serious implications on the persons of Babangida and Ibori and their perceived roles in the Nigerian politics. According to **P45** '*the duo of Christine Ibori-Ibie, the only surviving sister of Chief James Ibori, and Udoamaka Onuigbo (Okoronkwo), Chief Ibori's mistress, Monday sentenced to a total of 25 years by Judge Christopher Hardy of a Southwark London Crown Court but they are to spend five years each in prison. Christine and Udoamaka were last week found guilty by a 12-man jury of various financial crimes including money laundering, mortgage fraud and wire fraud.*' Notice that the name 'Ibori' runs through the report and is also foregrounded in the topic of the post. Rather than foreground the names of the women who were directly conflicted of financial crimes, they are left in the background and merely referred to as 'Ibori associates' or 'surviving sister of Chief James Ibori' or 'Chief Ibori's mistress' thereby making the implicit meaning almost obvious. To someone not familiar with the Nigerian context, nominalization of Ibori in the topic of the post may appear natural since he was a former governor in Nigeria. But to an insider, the post is based on background knowledge of the corrupt roles of the former Delta state governor. Described as 'the thieving governor' (**P.45**), he was in 2009 discharged of 170 charges of corruption by a Federal High Court in Asaba. He later escaped to Dubai from where he was recently arrested to face corruption charges probably in the UK where he was standing trial for money laundering.

While **P85** appears like an explicit statement of fact, it also raises questions about the opposition of the ex-governors and the implications of the opposition on the return of Nuhu Ribadu. The critics of EFCC established by the Obasanjo's administration which Ribadu was president, believed that the anti-corruption agency was a mere political instrument targeted at Obasanjo's political opponents. Critics wondered why Babangida was never probed by EFCC. Some corrupt governors are probably still suspicious of Ribadu since he was Obasanjo's loyalist.

Similarly, **P21** is explicit about the Northern leaders' action in favour of Jonathan's 2011 presidential ambition, at least to an outsider to the Nigerian politics. But to an insider, the approval of the Northern political class has a huge implication to the Nigerian politics, and this is left implicit in the post. In **P21** Jonathan is said to receive 'a green light' to run for 2011 general elections. To the average Nigerian, this

approval by the Northern leaders, notably the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) implies that Jonathan has won the election even before the official general elections. The heated debate about zoning the presidency (i.e. Nigeria is divided into six geo-political zones in order to rotate the office of the president, meaning that candidates are not necessarily elected by the people on merit) has generated a lot controversy. The Northern political class that has dominated the presidency for a long time would vacate the presidential seat only on condition that they rule by proxy, while the 'president' (from the south) becomes a mere stooge. It is with this understanding that Jonathan is perhaps given approval. Again this implies that political offices in Nigeria are largely manipulated fraudulently. Election 'winners' are in actual fact, 'selected' by the political class (Ifukor, 2008). This interpretation is not explicit in the post. That Babangida is to be probed over \$12.4 billion scam implies that the former military leader had been involved in financial fraud, an accusation which Babangida himself denies (P25). According to the post the former president is said to 'mismanage' the gulf oil windfall. In the Nigerian context 'mismanage' implies embezzlement or outright stealing of public funds. Many political observers and critics believe that IBB's wealth is directly connected to his misappropriation of the oil boom money during the Gulf war. According to press reports some years ago, the wealth of Babangida and Abacha alone far exceeded the total income of some African countries (see *The News*, August 17, 1998). This explains the widespread speculation that Babangida could indeed have been guilty of financial fraud.

(v) Directive acts

Arguably the political and social discourse contents of *Nolitics* perform the various speech acts proposed by Austin and Searle, for instance the 'representative act' (i.e. describing events, also asserting, claiming, reporting and suggesting); they also perform 'directive acts' i.e. requesting, pleading, inviting and directing (Searle, 1969), which are considered more significant in the context of this study. Because *Nolitics* involves a form of social mobilization, the post writers adopt persuasive strategies that tend to 'direct' or 'plead with' people to perform their civic responsibilities especially in the forthcoming 2011 general elections. This form of discursive strategy is also evident in the 'suggestion/recommendation' category where post writers suggest how Nigeria's social and economic problems might be solved. The latter combines both the representative acts and directive acts. A few examples of directive acts from the social and political mobilization sub-group are reproduced here:

- P.23 Support the people mandate (ALH. TEINA ABDULMALIK FOR HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVE)
- P.37 Support Ibn Shuaib for Kogi state governor, 2011 for better change of state
- P.57. Stop IBB (Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida)

Directive acts are usually imperative sentences that issue commands, often with the tone of urgency and desperation as the above examples illustrate. Political discourse, especially those that involve campaigning for elections often apply a lot persuasive nuances to force the listener/reader to take action in favour of certain politicians or their agents. Although much of the political struggle, involves argument, threats, entreaties, promises and lies (Chilton, 2004), the tenor of communication at political arenas are usually quite intriguing. P23 and P37 above urge the electorate to 'support' the politicians named in the posts, while P57 rather urges them to 'stop IBB.' Unlike the general forms of command, writers of political directives as in the above examples would generally give reasons for their positions. For instance, the writer of P57 claimed that Babangida 'murdered democracy' in Nigeria, therefore ineligible for any political office. The kind of passion we see in the social mobilization, are also visible in the suggestion and recommendation category. While the writer of P94 for instance urges Nigerians to demand a 'checklist' from political parties, he applies directive acts with active verbs such as *vote*, *stay*, *follow*, *delegate*, *go* etc. to mobilise political participation. The electorates are to *vote* during elections, *stay* around till the votes are counted, *follow* the returning officer(s) or *delegate* people to follow the returning officers till the overall results are announced. *Monitor* elections in your locality. *Go* to pooling stations with hidden cameras or spy cameras. Better still; *take* pictures with mobile phones. Hence, directive speech acts reflect the desperation and anxiety of Nigerians over the future of their beloved country. It also highlights the desperate changes which Nigeria desperately needs.

(vi) Indirect speech acts

A statement may be constructed to perform an action such as request or permission other than its direct implication, thus performing an 'indirect speech act' (Yule, 1985). For instance, a question may be understood as a request or an invitation to resistance or protest against abuse of power in government. Thus, an implicit statement may function as an indirect appeal to the reader's social ego or religious sentiment. In the example above, the question: 'will u vote Goodluck Jonathan?' (P28) was meant to be understood as a direct invitation to vote Jonathan. A similar question in P14: 'what do you want Jonathan to do?' is also to be understood as a commitment by Jonathan to meet all the needs of the people if voted to power. Many of the posts are constructed as questions, which may be interpreted as performing indirect speech acts. Although *Nolitics* is a discussion forum that demands that contributors and members respond to posts bringing out their opinions on particular socio-political issues, they also sample attitudes, sentiments and allegiances. This explains why the forum provides the medium where supporters of certain political parties and politicians often engage in fierce arguments. Comments and responses to posts by members of the discussion forum generally reveal the various interpretations, attitudes and value judgements conveyed by particular posts. The posts (written as questions) below perform various indirect speech acts:

- (i) Is it do or die for IBB? 'Will you vote for IBB?' (P.5)
- (ii) Are politicians this bad? (P.8)
- (iii) Is he lying (referring to the state governor) (P.18).
- (iv) Will Biafra come back? (P. 34)

Is it do or die for IBB? 'Will you vote for IBB?' (Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida) (P.5) – is to be interpreted as a direct statement such as 'IBB is too desperate to be president,' or 'To become the next civilian president is a matter of life and death for IBB' which could be interpreted from a negative perspective such as insatiable power mongering, in which case pursuit of political power is viewed as mere personal ambition - to satisfy personal greed and self aggrandisement. Hence, the question 'will you vote for IBB' is expected to receive a 'no' answer. The question performs an indirect speech act because it appeals to the reader's sense of justice to resist corruption and political power abuse. While the question 'will you vote Jonathan?' is meant to be understood as 'you will vote Jonathan?' the question, 'will you vote for IBB?' is to be understood as 'you will not vote for IBB.'

Are politicians this bad? (P.8) indirectly means: 'our politician are this bad' a direct statement (or representative act). This is supported by a statement in the body of the post which says: 'one of the albatrosses of our democracy is that its operators excuse themselves from real issues and set standards of comfort for themselves.' 'Albatrosses' represents intractable hindrances/obstacles to democracy which the 'operators' (Nigerian politicians) are associated with. By implication the politicians are indeed responsible for Nigeria's underdevelopment.

Is he lying (P.18) is also meant to be read as a statement: 'he is lying' (referring to the state governor). The post writer gives his reasons: 'my state governor says Bayelsa is heavily indebted. This he gives for the inability to pay salaries and carry out infrastructural development. As i write this, no one in the state knows how much was owed, how much has been paid thus far and what is left of the debt and we have been paying this debt for the three years or so of his administration.' Since *Nolitics* is also a forum where supporters of certain political parties and politicians often engage in arguments and debates, indirect speech acts (in form of questions) function as tact not to sound too direct or too critical. Similarly, the last question (P.18), 'will Biafra come back?' performs a representative act of informing, i.e. 'Biafra is likely to come back?' The Biafra question has recently generated a lot of anxiety and heated arguments among the group discussion members. Assumed widespread activities of the Biafran campaigns on the internet and their associated links have generated extensive speculations. The Biafran campaign group was said have a well organized and influential leadership which claimed to be recognized by most powerful and important countries of the world with its headquarters in the United States. They maintain subsidiary media affiliates such as radio Biafra, an on-line radio network, newspapers and magazines and also affiliated to other sub-organizations and their activities are supported by a very solid financial base with its members in different sectors of the world.

However, reactions to these posts were mixed with most people not foreseeing a possible resuscitation of the defunct state, main reason being that the Igbo nation no longer boasts of the cohesion and the system of trust that once characterized them. Especially with the decamping of the original leader, Odumegwu

Ojukwu and the frequent tussle for leadership in the 'Ohaneze Ndigbo' (an Igbo elite group) it would be almost impossible to rally the Igbos again for a political struggle. 'Republic of Biafra' was a secessionist nation of the Igbos of the southeast Nigeria that existed between 30th May 1967 and 15 January, 1970. It became defunct after a civil war in which over three million Igbos died (see Dike, 2006). The defeat of the Igbos and the re-integration of the south-eastern region in 'one Nigerian' have also been described by critics as 'a forced unity' - a mere legacy of the colonial administration. Nigeria's social problems have also been attributed to the size of the multi-ethnic nations that make up the country. With about 400 languages in Nigeria (Adegbiya, 1997) and English as the official language, the inherent fear of ethnic domination by the various ethnic groups remains. One of the comments responding to the incessant Jos crises suggests that a break-up of Nigeria into smaller independent states is the solution to Nigeria's frequent inter-ethnic and religious crises. The existence of a pro-Biafran radicalist movement known as the Movement for the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) is well known in Nigeria today. This movement still advocates a separate country for the Igbo people and accuses the Nigerian state of marginalising them. MASSOB identifies itself as a peaceful group and advertises a 25-stage plan to achieve its goal peacefully (Murray, 2007; Shirbon, 2006). Its leader Raph Uwazuruike has been arrested several times by the Federal Government and is still being detained since 2005 on charges of treason.

CONCLUSION

Nolitics- a discussion forum provides an ample opportunity for Nigerians to participate in social and political interactions/debates. This reveals the willingness of the people to participate in political matters that affect them; it also highlights the need to make political governance accessible to people. Because online social media have the advantage of combining speed and currency with the facility that enable asynchronous CMD (e.g. blogs and posts) to be stored and archive messages at the addressee's site until they are read, interactants are able to monitor and follow-up socio-political debates to their conclusions. Discussion forums enable participants within and outside Nigeria to disseminate their views on important socio-political issues while remaining anonymous. Interestingly, 'Nigerian friends' (from other countries) are also welcome to participate in *Nolitics*. We can conclude therefore that the emergence of the online social media like weblog and subsequent discussion forums is enabling Nigerians to be involved in political debates much more than ever before. More voices are being heard, social problems are being discussed and more people are participating in political debates. The analyses of the discourse in *Nolitics* shows that discursive/pragmatic strategies such as implication, indirectness, speech acts and modality have been implied to social criticism, political mobilization and social interaction. This form of social and political participation is likely to increase in the future since online awareness is already created and bloggers are getting involved in CMD. Political involvement and participation in governance defines the concept of citizenship in the context of political discourse in *Nolitics*. Interestingly with Nigerian politicians coming on Facebook and registering their own blogs, there is no doubt that the general influence generated from contributions by the people via the social media, would shape social morality and political performance.

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